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INTERVIEW OF THOMAS CASASIN
AUGUST 17, 1978
AMERICAN EMBASSY/ PARIS, FRANCE

By Surell Brady

Casasin stated that he retired from the Central Intelligence Agency in 1973. At the time of the assassination of President Kennedy in November, 1963 he was stationed in Paris; he was working in the area of Soviet operations, but had no official cover. He arrived in Paris in September, 1962.

He stated that in September, 1960 he was assigned [defense cover] 24 as Branch 6 Chief. He worked for two years in Section 6.

Casasin said that during his assignment in Paris he had not infrequent contact with the CIA station in Paris. He estimated that the contact occurred every two and a half weeks. The contact was made on the outside by telephoning a person with official cover. He said he never made written contact with the station.

Casasin explained that the function of Section 6 was operations in support of the Soviet Russia Division of the CIA. He said the work consisted of amassing information in support of the SR Division; he characterized that work as classical espionage work against the USSR. He said it involved penetration for the purpose of espionage and included cartography, demography, sociology, and experts in the fields of science and political science. He stated that the section was in a "down" phase when he entered and that it consisted of only 20-25 persons.

Casasin worked in Japan from February 1955 to June 1960. He served as Chief of the Soviet Base of the North Asia Command. He said his unit was attached to the Far Eastern Command of the Armed Forces. He explained that his unit was one of four bases: Soviet, Japan, North Korea and Red China. Each of those geographical areas was a target. The Soviet base in which he worked was therefore targeted against the Soviet Union. He was assigned head of that base in 1955.

He said the operations out of the Soviet base included espionage. The covert operations consisted of psychological warfare and radio transmission to internal Soviet audiences. He said the espionage also included spying against Soviet naval and industrial targets in Soviet ports, using mainly Japanese operatives who had access to the ports.

Casasin said that his base had extremely limited work with the

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military. He said it consisted primarily of briefing the military on items of mutual interest. He said the CIA had tried to work with clandestine units of the military, including the Army (he said the Navy had no clandestine units), but it was the opinion of the CIA that the military had too low a degree of professionalism for the successful operation of clandestine projects. Casasin stated that during this time the military said it was actually running operations, but it was never confirmed by the CIA and they found no evidence of such military operations.

Casasin identified two military intelligence personnel in the area when he was stationed in Japan: Captain Perez, OSI, and John B. Stanley, Army head.

Casasin said, however, that the Navy did provide some operational support for his base. It consisted of providing [cover] for persons running operations against the Soviets.

Casasin said he cannot recall any specific information that the military was using American military personnel in any of its operations. He said, however, that there ~~was~~ were occasional rumors that an American serviceman was trafficking with suspected foreign subversives. He said the individual intelligence agencies would have handled any such cases. He stated that he never heard any concrete information of American contact with the Soviets.

Casasin could not recall the name of the Chief of the North Asia Command in 1955; he believed the man was a retired vice admiral and that his last name began with the letter "O." Harry Little succeeded that person in 1957.

Casasin said that most of his communications during that time from Japan went back to headquarters. He explained that the North Asia Command at that time was tied up with the situation of Korea and Japan.

Casasin said that he does not know who had the oversight responsibility or authority for the U-2 program. He cited that as an example of how well compartmentalized their work was. He said he never learned who was in charge of the U-2 program out of Japan. He said that he assumed it was some type of paramilitary operation. He said the North Asia base ran no paramilitary operations and that most such smaller units usually did not.

Casasin said he does not recall any discussions concerning the possible use of American defectors to penetrate the Soviets. He said one reason for no interest in such use was probably that the First

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Chief Directorate of the KGB would suspect any such American from the beginning as being CIA connected. He said the CIA at that point knew a lot about the KGB and its thinking because they had had experience with displaced persons from the communist bloc.

Casasin explained further that American intelligence interests were much more short range than the type of slow, long-range project of working an American defector into some sensitive or intelligence-productive position within the Soviet Union. He said that was simply not the American way of conducting intelligence and that that thinking precluded such programs.

Casasin said lessening of tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union from such things as the Spirit of Camp David did allow some shallow penetration. This consisted primarily of using short-term tourists and foreigners on legitimate business within the Soviet Union. But he said these projects had no direct or obvious effects on our intelligence gathering against the Soviet Union.

I referred Casasin to CIA Document 435-173-A, which is a memo dated 25 November 1963 from Thomas B. Casasin to Walter P. Haltigan on Mr. Lee Harvey Oswald. Casasin says he does remember the memo. I asked him to explain the cover memo dated 12 December 1963 by Robert G. Lamprell to Chiefs of SR and WH re: GPFLOOR-Lee Harvey Oswald.

3 Casasin explained that Lamprell (whose real name was [William Robert Sinclair] he died of cancer a few years ago) was one of Casasin's contacts in Paris. He said that Lamprell was the Senior Officer in the Soviet Office in the Paris Station, and served as the second in 3 command. Casasin said that Walter Haltigan (whose real name was [James Flint] was his normal contact in Paris. He surmised that his memo was sent out by Lamprell because Haltigan might not have been available. He does not know the reason for the delay between the date of his memo, 25 November, and the transmission by Lamprell, 12 December.

Casasin said he recalls that he wrote the memo spontaneously when he heard a news cast about Oswald after the assassination. He recognized Oswald when he heard the news information that Oswald had lived in Minsk in the Soviet Union and had married a foreigner. He remembered those details from State Department information he had seen.

Casasin explained the cryptonym REDWOOD as clandestine operations; the Chief of the SR Division was responsible for that project. He explained that was separate from the REDCAP program, which was operations against Soviets outside of the USSR.

Casasin explained the relationship of the Counterintelligence

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staff to other divisions. He said Counterintelligence had primary responsibility for staff review, but supposedly no command voice. However, they did have their own closely held operations. Counterintelligence gave approval on every operation. Casasin said that it was possible or even probable that Counterintelligence ran operations in his geographical target.

Casasin said research was one of the functions of the 6 Branch. But he cannot recall research's exact mandate within the 6 Branch. He listed the branches besides 6 Branch: (1) Scandinavia; (2) Western Europe; (3) Middle East and Latin America; (4) ? ; (5) Far East; and the Inter-Branch.

Casasin said the the research unit of Branch 6 would get information from defectors about Soviet realities and details about Soviet life which could be used to assist persons working inside the Soviet Union. He said such defectors were normally pumped about personal life in the USSR. However, Casasin said he does not personally know of any defectors being used as a source in his brief time in the SR Division. He said the agency also benefitted from FBI debriefings of such defectors. In part this was due to the CIA's limited charter domestically in the United States. But the Contacts Division (OO) did have a domestic mandate within the U.S. Casasin said he thought the American defector to Czechoslovakia, Fields, had been debriefed by the agency. Casasin said he believed the agency also got information on Americans in the Soviet Union from State Department information about visas or from the press.

Casasin said he cannot remember who served as Chief of the Section 6 research branch while he was there. He said the deputy chief was an older woman near the age of retirement. He said that Rudolf Balaban worked with him and is still at the agency; he could probably remember the names of the others in the section.

I asked when Casasin recalled the discussion took place which he refers to in his memo. He said it was the last days of his work with the section; he assumes it was the third or fourth week of July, 1962 when he left the section, so he believes the conversation about Oswald took place the first week of July, 1962.

Casasin said at the time he assumed Oswald had been sent out of the Soviet Union by the KGB, so he exercsied caution and did not attempt to debrief Oswald.

Casasin gave the following dates in an effort to pin down when the conversation took place. He said he left Japan on June 25, 1960 and

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travelled through Europe on leave with his family until Spetember, 1960. He said therefore the conversation could not have taken place in the summer of 1960 as the memo states. He said he used the wrong year in the memo.

Casasin identified KUJUMP as the Operations Division. He said it had a contacts division for debriefing persons. He said the "suitable channels" for debriefing referred to in the memo were the Immi gration and Naturalization Service and the FBI. He said he believed he had received maybe one State Department dispatch on the returning American. He said the dispatch probably originated if Oswald had given up his passport at the Embassy in Moscow and had had to reapply to the embassy to be able to return to the United States. Casasin said he believes Oswald's contacts with the Embassy in Moscow were initiated by Oswald. Casasin said he only knew whatever appeared in the State Department dispatches about Oswald.

He said his statement in the memo that Oswald looked "odd" was the CIA's evaluation of Oswald. This was based on the fact that he was allowed to live in the Soviet Union and permitted to marry a Soviet citizen. Casasin said he believed some type of controlled intelligence station should approach Oswald; they would be able to contact and talk to him in a perfunctory manner for debriefing purposes.

Casasin said that during the period 1945-60 no more than 10 American defectors came to their attention from the State Department and the military.

Casasin identified the REDSKIN cryptonym as the legal travellers program. It involved using persons to give information about the Soviet Union who had a "very legitimate" presence in the Soviet Union, such as scientists, etc.

Casasin said the agency which conducted the debriefing of these people and defectors would write the information and pass it on. He believes therefore that if Oswald had been debriefed he would have seen the information in that form.

Casasin said he believes it is inconceivable that Oswald would have been any type of operative of the CIA. However, he also gave his opinion that the nature of KGB operations made it conceivable that Oswald could have been a "lay-low" Soviet operative.

I asked about the CIA interest in Minsk which is reflected in Casasin's memo. Casasin said it was known that there were some type of special design plants in Minsk which were of interest to the CIA.

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Casasin said that type of special design plant dealt with aviation, nuclear energy, bacterialogical warfare, etc. He said that he cannot remember specifically which type of plants were located in Minsk, but the city was of interest for that reason. Additionally, anyone in the area of those plants was of interest to the agency. Casasin said he is confident that Oswald was not working in any type of security facility. He said even with the presence of the design plants, Minsk was not identified as a security or military priority area. Casasin said also that he believes they had some type of encyclopedic information at the agency on the radio factory in Minsk where Oswald worked. He said that kind of information was maintained in the Office of Research and Reporting. Casasin said he was not aware of a KGB facility in Minsk.

Casasin said the Legal Travellers Program was headed at the time of his memo by Alexander Sokaloff (phonetic) of the Soviet Russia Division. He said the program began pre-1960 with the lessening of tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. He said Sokaloff had come out of the Soviet Union with his parents as a child. He explained that defectors such as Sokaloff were kept at arms length for security reasons by the agency.

The Legal Travellers Program operated in such a way that the agency contact was in touch with the traveller well before the proposed trip and would be informed as to which areas would be visited, what he would be doing in the country, etc. The agency contact would then be able to give the traveller the agency's "requirements" for information while he was abroad. Casasin said he was not involved in the program. He said he was opposed to it because it was too short-term to justify the investment of resources and the risk involved. He said he believes the travellers were told that their contacts were CIA, but he doesn't know for sure. He said cover may have been used by the contact.

I asked Casasin what the reference to the "Harvey Story" in the last line of his memo referred to. He said at first that it must have been some kind of cryptonym he was using at the time. He pondered a while. Then he said he would need some kind of prompting of his memory. He said he doubts that it would have been someone's true name.

Casasin said he has never been contacted by anybody, including the Warren Commission, about the memo.

He said that his interest in Oswald as expressed in the memo was just a lead. He said the fact of no follow-up on that lead was not unusual. He said Oswald's going to the Soviet Union was unusual, but that left him open to the possibility of KGB contact. He therefore

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ultimately was of only marginal interest to the agency.

Casasin said it was normal to not make a check for a 201 file on a person like Oswald, meaning that it was not unusual that he did not check for Oswald's 201. He said this was epsecially not unusual since they had made the decision not to use Oswald. It's possible that a colleague of Casasin's might have checked, but Casasin said he doesn't recall any such check.

Casasin said his subordinates in the Branch 6 were, Balaban, a man named Richard, last name possibly [Wink], and [Charles Cox,] who was the liaison with the Technical Supports Division (i.e., concealment devices). He said deputies in the branch were David Chachavadze (in 1960 for three or four months), A.T. Stewart (possibly Averill); Stewart stayed on in the branch and Casasin believe he could be of more help in remebering details about the branch; also, Becky Balaban, who is married to Rudolf Balaban.

Casasin said that the purpose of a 201 is to indicate that a request had been made for provisional operational approval. He said the file would indicate operational interest and would then refer one to the specific office with the interest in the individual. He said he doesn't know that actual criteria for opening 201's. He said also that after initial interest was shown in an individual by the opening of a 201, the number might remain with the individual without the persen actually being developed as an asset.

Casasin mentioned that agency people were assigned to the military base at Atsugi.

Casasin referred agin to the "Harvey Story" reference in his memo. He sated that "Whatever I meant by Harvey had nothing to do with him (Oswald)."

I showed Casasin the Personality (201) File Request form from Oswald's 201 file. He said he had never seen it before and did not know there actually existed a 201 file on Oswald. Referring to the source of the form, CI/SIG, Casasin said Ci stood for Counterintelligence. He said he thought SIG stood for Signal Intelligence, but he was not sure. He said that notation would mean that NSA or the military had picked up Oswald's name in some type of transmission. He asked if Oswald had access to any type of radio transmissions. He said he thought the 201 section of the Registry Office could answer questions about the notations on the form.

Referring to the "AG" notation in the Other Identification

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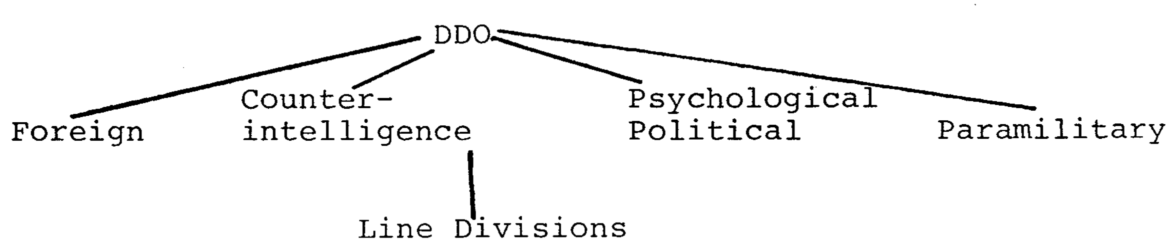
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block on the form, Casasin said he does not know what it stood for. I asked him if he understood why some of the notations were crossed out and new notations had been made; he said he could not explain that. He said he thought the Permanent Charge notation meant that the file would stay in the Office of Registry and that the file therefore had no operational significance. In this file he said he thought it would be routine to open a file on defectors such as Oswald, so it may have had some other office charge because of that. He said Branch 6 did not have an interest in the Oswald file.

I asked how he would have come across the State Department communications on Oswald. He said the normal distribution of such State Department information would mean that the dispatches would be circulated for information and then routed back to registry where they would be kept on file as Third Agency documents. He said he believes from the dispatches he saw on Oswald that they were in a consecutive series as received from the State Department. He believes from the memo that he must have seen several such dispatches with information about Oswald.

Casasin explained the operational interest various divisions within the agency might have in this way:



He said he believes the 201 Personality form in Oswald's file is passive and not operational and sees nothing to indicate operational interest. He said the above scheme means that only the line divisions would carry the operations, and he does not see any indication of such an interest on the form. The fact that only Counterintelligence is indicated on the form seems to preclude any operations.

Casasin talked further about suspicions about Oswald. He expressed the feeling the Oswald and Marina got their visas to leave the Soviet Union too easily. He expalined the "unusual behavior" of Oswald as being his defection: his reasons were unknown, he seemed disoriented, he married a Russian. Casasin said that while he does not believe Oswald was sent back to the United States by the Soviets, he cannot preclude that possibility.

I asked if the Americans were able to follow Oswald's activities

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while he was living in the Soviet Union. Casasin said he doesn't believe we were able to monitor him inside the USSR. He said it would have been too risky to run the chance of exposing any operatives inside the country.

I asked if Oswald's threat at the Embassy in Moscow to reveal milit ary secrets to the Soviets wouldn't have made Oswald of more intelligence interest. Casasin said if he had revealed secrets he would have been of interest for security.

I asked Casasin if a memo would have existed from the time of the conversation referred to in his 1963 memo about interest in Oswald. He said he doesn't think so; he said it was not customary to write memos about such leads which were discussed and not follow-ed-up. He does not remember preparing any such memo.

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